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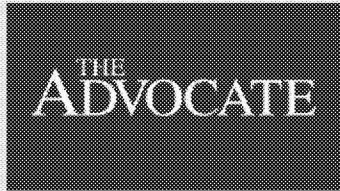
**From:** America's WETLAND Foundation [gene@marmillionco.ccsend.com]  
on behalf of America's WETLAND Foundation [americaswetland@mcopr.com]  
**Sent:** 6/5/2014 1:58:02 PM  
**To:** Ettinger, John [ettinger.john@epa.gov]  
**Subject:** The Advocate: Private Investment May Be Another Avenue to Wetlands Restoration



NEWS ALERT

# Private investment may be another avenue to wetlands restoration

## Wetland foundation pushing for more



AMY WOLD  
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June 04, 2014

A \$181 million fund to restore a large portion of the East Orleans Land Bridge didn't come from local, state or federal government.

The money to dredge sediment and rebuild marsh is from a private investment. It's just one example of what America's Wetland Foundation would like to see more of for certain coastal restoration projects that could get done faster and cheaper than through the federal process.

"There are large investment funds that are looking for this kind of investment," Val Marmillion, America's Wetland Foundation's managing director, told the Governor's Advisory Commission on Coastal Protection, Restoration and Conservation on Wednesday.

In addition to increasing the scale and scope of mitigation banks like the one in New Orleans East, the foundation is also working on a coastal exchange that would connect investors with private landowners as well as on a biomass development program to give landowners incentives to do restoration.

These types of public/private projects can support the state's master plan for coastal restoration and development, he said.

Encouraging and developing private investment in conservation and coastal restoration could help bridge some of the funding gaps. The federal government is not going to have all the money to fund the \$50 billion, 50-year state master plan or for all the additional projects that may not be a priority right now.

With the movement internationally and nationally for sustainability, "investors are looking to invest in large-scale conservation projects," Marmillion said.

The project at the East Orleans Land Bridge started when Ecosystem Investment Partners purchased 16,472 acres, including the Chef Menteur Pass Wetland Mitigation Bank, in 2012. The mitigation bank is the only permitted marsh mitigation bank in southeastern Louisiana.

Credits from the bank can be sold to other entities as they mitigate damage done to marsh areas through the building of levees, roads or other construction.

Other parts of the property not in the mitigation bank area will be used as a Natural Resource Damage mitigation bank, which mitigates for other damage, according to the company's website.

Marmillion said they have two dredges on site now that are working 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Under the federal funding process, the major authorization for water projects comes through the Water Resources Development Act. It can take years to get projects authorized under the act. Even if a project makes it through and is approved by Congress, that doesn't guarantee funding. A private company doing restoration as an investment has much more incentive to get the process done quickly.

"It shortcuts everything," Marmillion said.

Another option to be explored in the coming months involves forming a coastal exchange like one being developed in Texas.

The concept is to connect landowners with companies interested in planting trees or other environmental or ecosystem enhancements in exchange for payments to the landowners.

This helps keep areas that would be prone to flooding from development while providing compensation for the landowner.

The foundation is also working with groups that are developing salt-resistant grasses that could be used in southwest Louisiana or southeast Texas as a source of biomass, which is in demand in European markets for energy production. This would provide landowners income on their property while helping recharge salt-damaged soils.

At the heart of these funding ideas is the question of how much the wetlands are worth, not just in acreage but in public services they provide for storm surge protection, water quality or wildlife habitat.

Beginning in September, the foundation will be bringing together experts on valuing ecosystems to better define the concept for Louisiana so it can be tested on the market, said Sidney Coffee, foundation senior advisor.

"We can test it better than anyone," Coffee said.

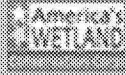
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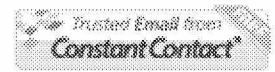
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